



ASHA KIRAN

Asha-Seattle's quarterly Newsletter

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Fellow Asha patrons,

Thank you for your continued and full fledged support to Asha. Your belief in us is what keeps Asha going. We value and appreciate your time and contributions that invariably brings a smile on a child's face. Every child is born privileged and we should do everything in our capacity to empower and grow those privileges. Through our newsletters we hope to bring you closer to Asha with unbridled enthusiasm. The months from October through December sees a lot of

fund raising activities in and around Seattle, be it the Seattle Marathon during the Thanksgiving week, or the United Way Give campaigns that corporate companies like Microsoft and Boeing endorse.

Let us continue to empower a child's life with laughter and love through education!

Eid Mubarak! Happy Dussera! Happy Thanksgiving!

“What I learnt from conversations with Dr. Vinod Raina”

Swati Sircar

PART 2

When Dr. Vinod Raina (Eklavya Foundation, Madhya Pradesh, India) visited Asha-Seattle in May 2007, some of us volunteers were fortunate to spend long hours with him discussing various topics. Dr. Raina has had a remarkable and extended experience of about 30 years in the field of education in India. In his talk he threw light on education strategies in India and his own experiences in the field. I have captured his experiences as anecdotes in broad categories, not necessarily related.

In part 1 of the article, we presented Dr. Raina's views on Math education, the Hosangabad Science Teaching program. We conclude the remaining portion of this article.

D. A matrilineal society in a patriarchic Indian society and the Census bureau

With the majority of the Indian society being patriarch, the national census forms are standardized to default men as heads of household. Now, most societies in the northeastern states of India are matrilineal, and typically have a woman as the household head. The census officer in the region tried, within her powers, to have the forms made more inclusive to recognize women as household heads. Unfortunately the forms were designed at a national level and were not open to changes.

In the Adivasi communities at the foothills of the Himalayas, it is common for women to be polygamous. The communities have a self-defined system on how a woman and the men interact amongst each other. Amongst the various powers she has, an Adivasi woman has the right to reject a partner and evict him out of the house. But these powers do not make a difference during the census period, which fails to recognize such households.

We were curious; if a Muslim man has the right to have many wives and the census bureau recognizes this, then why does it

not recognize a woman having the same rights of marriage?

The followers of Islam are considered to belong to a different religious society and thus have special legal rights. However, Adivasis are considered Hindus; thus, an adivasi lady does not have the legal Hindu rights to be polygamous even though her society recognizes her right.

1 Matrilineal – denoting descent from the female line. Specifically, women can exercise property rights and are financially more secure. However, this does not mean that men have less power in the way patriarchal societies give less power to women. In such societies, the exploitation of women and women-related crimes are rare.

E. Land rights and Displacement – how it affects the woman and possible solutions

It is a fact that many of the multidimensional realty development projects have led to the displacement of the poor, adivasis in particular; the poor who hardly benefit from these projects. When a community loses its land, the implications are several:

- Cultivated land is the livelihood of the people of the community. Those who own land typically use the land for agriculture and also as common property resources (CPR). The land provides better food security. The land makes people less dependent on market forces. But when a community loses its land, including CPR (e.g. common water source, grazing land, and forest area) its people lose access to water, fuel & independent livelihood. They are forced to work as laborers and inherently become entirely dependent on external means which provides no job security and over which the people have no control.
- When a community is broken up due to displacement people

become more vulnerable, the most vulnerable being the women folk. Typically women enjoy much more freedom and security within adivasi communities. This is completely lost when people get displaced. Women become more susceptible to various kinds of harassment and threats including sexual ones.

- Any displacement compensation, if any, is typically one-time lump cash. This money typically goes to the male head of household who spends it on either liquor or a motorcycle or any such extravagancy. Women usually do not have much control on this and rarely get any benefit from the compensation money. In addition, many such communities are not very familiar with handling money since they might depend on a barter system within their community. So the compensation money gets misspent and soon they are left with nothing.

Our question was on how we minimize land grabbing by corporate and government that leads to people being displaced and communities being destroyed. Below are different possibilities to this dilemma.

Option 1:

Allow the community's local body like the village panchayat, decide on whether to give up the land or not. However the problems with this would be that the local authority might not have the big picture in mind. So many worthy projects may not take off. However, if the local body consists of very few members or allows only its head to make a decision, then they can be easily coerced or bribed into selling or leasing the land.

Option 2:

Give the decision making rights to the state or central government and recognize their decisions to supersede the local bodies' decision. This of course, is the current standard approach. In many states, the governments are trying to change the law so that they get more power to take over adivasi land, which by law cannot be purchased by any non-adivasi. The problem with this is that the rights of the people who originally own the lands are relinquished.

Option 3:

Our suggestion is to have both the local body and the state government come to a common consensus. The advantage of this approach is that the involvement of local body authorizes more rights to the people directly affected. Moreover, the involvement of state government can foresee any non-effective judgements made by the local few, such as if the sarpanch was to sell a forest land that would have a negative impact on the environment, then state government can intervene and reject such a transaction. Likewise, if the state government has a need for the land for a "greater common good" they would have to get it approved by the local body. That would also include giving adequate benefits to the people being displaced.

According to Dr. Raina, some groups working on these issues are trying to bring in Option 3 as the legal process.

All in all, our interactions with Dr. Raina were effective and well learned.

Know more about Dr. Raina at <http://word.world-citizenship.org/word/index.php/wp-archive/225>

Site Visit photo gallery

by Swati Sircar, September 2007



One Early Childhood Education (ECE) center in Champa Mahila Society (CMS)



Traditional Santhali welcome dance by girls at Uthnau's 10th anniversary



Active learning at Surendra Smriti Bidyaniketan (SSB) in CMS



Physiotherapy at for special children at Ahead

What indeed should a free man do?

Saurabh Madan, 2007

It does not start with conquering the world ... oh no...
it does not start with working for one's country ... no it doesn't
It does not start with volunteering for one's community ...
It does not start with working for one's family ...

These pieces fall into place automatically
They are nurtured by the glory of the most important task
They build one upon the other ...
first the family, then the community,
then the country, then the world

It all starts with me,
It starts with an individual's self purification,
All the service made to the world is meaningless if I myself am weak,
It starts with gaining strength in character
It starts with self development

And when these things fall into place,
the others will follow ...
like the planets bask in the sun's glory
like nations bask in the glory of good men (and women)

My deeds will touch my kin and friends,
it is through my actions that I will guide their development
All talk is useless
All intentions of upliftment are vain

The only downtrodden one has to lift is oneself
and the downtrodden of the world will rise in one's shadow
The only man I pity is me,
when I am strong, my people will follow.

The greatest service a man can do
is to cease to be the cause for other's worry,
when one is secure in the eyes of the world,
then alone can one be an inspiration

With purity of purpose,
selflessness in motives,
With the conquest of lusts,
Must this journey begin ...

<http://anidealcalledindia.blogspot.com/2007/07/what-indeed-should-free-man-do.html>

Happenings

Past

- The Wheels of change 2007 Asha-Seattle bikers successfully raised nearly \$11000 last quarter 2007.
- A successful peaceful candlelight vigil to support the Indian Farmers in distress was held on Oct 2nd, to mark Gandhi Jayanthi, attracting nearly 45 supporters on that rainy evening.
- Work an hour 2007

Upcoming

- Miles for smiles 2007: Asha Marathoners are training hard towards the Seattle marathon on Thanksgiving weekend this year.
- AllgoRhythms 2007: Oct 20th and Oct 21st (Sat and Sun) at Mercer Island high school Arts Center. For more details contact Alka Jhawar at 206-428-7501

INDIA FACTS

Sushruta is regarded as the father of surgery. Over 2600 years ago Sushruta & his team conducted complicated surgeries like cataract, artificial limbs, cesareans, fractures, urinary stones and also plastic surgery and brain surgeries.

The art of **Navigation & Navigating** was born in the river Sindh 6000 over years ago. The very word 'Navigation' is derived from the Sanskrit word NAVGATI. The word navy is also derived from the Sanskrit word 'Nou'.

The game of **snakes & ladders** was created by the 13th century poet saint Gyandev. It was originally called 'Mokshapat.' The ladders in the game represented virtues and the snakes indicated vices. The game was played with cowrie shells and dices. Later through time, the game underwent several modifications but the meaning is the same i.e good deeds take us to heaven and evil to a cycle of re-births.

The World's first university was established in Takshila in 700 BC. More than 10,500 students from all over the world studied more than 60 subjects. The University of Nalanda built in the 4th century was one of the greatest achievements of ancient India in the field of education.

Ayurveda is the earliest school of medicine known to mankind. The father of medicine, Charaka, consolidated Ayurveda 2500 years ago.

35 million Indian kids under 16 are out of school. one-third of fifth graders cannot read or write